

Occasional Paper

The US-Japan Alliance Confronts the Anti-Access and Area Denial Challenge:

Toward Building Capacity, Cooperation and Information Sharing in the Western Pacific



David Fouse, Ph.D

Dr. David Fouse is a professor at the Asia-Pacific-Center for Security Studies. This paper was presented at the Meiji University Symposium on “The U.S.-Japan Alliance in the Maritime Domain” held in October 2014.

Tensions between Japan and China in the East China Sea have increased significantly over the past decade. Disputes between the two countries over the Senkaku/Daioyu islands that were left unresolved when the two countries normalized relations in 1972, along with overlapping claims to exclusive economic and more recently air defense identification zones have brought the two countries to the edge of conflict. With the coast guard, air and naval forces of both countries now patrolling the disputed areas in close proximity to each other, the possibility for escalation should an incident occur has never been higher. It is the position of this author that both parties to the disputed territory should attempt to resolve their differences by negotiating a compromise settlement.¹ In the meantime it is imperative that military to military hotlines are developed between the countries in order to prevent escalation should an incident occur. The recent high level talks in Qingdao represent a step in the right direction and a potential summit level meeting could help to cool tensions and restore focus on developing the bilateral economic relationship that is vital to both countries.

The focus of this brief paper, however, will be to discuss the manner in which Japan and the United States can work together to maintain the effectiveness of the alliance in the face of the growing capabilities of Chinese military forces, especially in terms of what has been described as China's anti-access and area denial (A2/AD) strategy. Maintenance of alliance effectiveness in this sense does not pertain to only the U.S. ability to support Japan in the event of a contingency related to the Senkaku islands or the East China Sea, although that is obviously at the top of Japan's list of security concerns at this moment. As China brings more of the pieces of its

A2/AD strategy online, the U.S. ability to maintain its forward presence in Asia and/or surge forces to the region for a wide variety of possible contingencies becomes increasingly imperiled.

China's Anti-Access/Area Denial Strategy

The development of China's anti-access and area denial strategy has been a subject of concern for the U.S. for over a decade. Though not referred to in such terms in Chinese open source documents, China's "counterintervention" strategy developed in juxtaposition to growing U.S. military capabilities demonstrated in Kosovo in 1999, the first Iraq War of 2001, as well as U.S. military actions taken during the Taiwan straits crisis in 1996.ⁱⁱ During this period China realized that if it was ever to confront the U.S. militarily, as in a potential Taiwan contingency, it would face a severe technological and organizational deficit over a broad range of capabilities. Over the past two decades China has attempted to address these shortcomings through doctrine that emphasizes maintaining "battlefield information dominance" and a wide ranging modernization program that will allow China to target and destroy relevant C3I nodes, weapons control centers, high value air assets on the ground, important sea combat platforms, as well as air and logistics bases.ⁱⁱⁱ Confronting a force with superior assets has also lead China to emphasize striking first and as far out as possible in order to deny the enemy battlefield information and access to vital Chinese assets.

In 2013 China increased its official annual military budget to over \$119.5 billion, continuing more than two decades of defense spending increases.^{iv} According to the U.S. Department of Defense's Annual Report to Congress on Military and Security Developments Involving the People's Republic of China 2014," China sustained its investments in strategic forces modernization, as well as key anti-access/area-denial (A2/AD) capabilities such as advanced intermediate- and medium-range conventional ballistic missiles, long-range land-attack and anti-ship cruise missiles, counter-space weapons, and offensive cyber capabilities."^v Many analysts believe that China's long-term investments in developing A2/AD capability is beginning to pay off. Some cite the development of the DF-21D medium-range ballistic missile, reported to be capable of targeting a moving ship, as a possible "game changer" in the Western Pacific.^{vi} Yet a number of weaknesses remain in terms of China's ability to keep "third parties" such as the United States out of the first and second island chains should conflict break out. China's forces still lack critical capabilities in terms of conducting joint operations, command and control for

targeting those anti-ship ballistic missiles (ASBM), anti-submarine warfare (ASW) and effective mine countermeasures (MCM).^{vii} A window of opportunity remains for the U.S., its allies and partners to develop their own means of sustaining deterrence.

U.S. Debates Response Strategy: Air-Sea Battle vs. Offshore Control

The U.S. response to China's developing A2/AD strategy has centered on the Air-Sea Battle (ASB) operational concept announced in the 2010 Quadrennial Defense Review. A year later the Joint Operational Access Concept was announced by Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Martine Dempsey, to describe his vision of how joint forces will operate in response to emerging anti-access and area-denial challenges.^{viii} The JOAC lists 11 operational access precepts from which the Air-Sea Battle operational concept will be honed. In conjunction with the announcement of the JOAC, the Air-Sea Battle Office (ASBO) was created and charged with implementing the ASB operational concept. An unclassified concept paper released by the ASBO in May 2013 describes the response to the A2/AD challenge in terms of developing "networked, integrated forces capable of attack-in-depth to disrupt, destroy and defeat adversary forces (NIA/D3)."^{ix} Having the ability to "attack in depth" requires having the ability to project forces through areas targeted for denial by enemy forces, disruption is aimed at opposing C4ISR capabilities, and enemy weapons are to be either destroyed on the ground or defeated after launch. In order to carry out "attack in depth" in the face of China's growing A2/AD capabilities the U.S. is spending billions of dollars to acquire longer ranged attack missiles such as the Joint Air-Surface Standoff Missile-Extended Range (JASSM-ER) for the Air Force and the Long Range Anti Ship Missile (LRASM) for the Navy, as well as developing new hypersonic missiles that can be launched from the United States and hit a target anywhere in the world.

Some American strategists are not completely comfortable with a doctrine that would require the United States to "attack in depth" at the outset of a contingency, fearing that it would necessarily include strikes on the Chinese mainland that could easily precipitate uncontrolled conflict escalation, possibly even provoking a nuclear response. Critics of Air-Sea Battle have been quick to point out that it is not a strategy for coping with a Chinese act of aggression, lacking as it does any discussion of how to end the conflict on terms favorable to the United States and its allies. Retired Marine colonel T.X. Hammes is a leading advocate of a blockade of Chinese shipping as

an alternative response to a Chinese provocation, arguing that such an approach would provide policymakers with an opportunity to apply economic pressure on China without necessarily escalating into full-blown conflict.^x This “Offshore Control” (OC) strategy would establish concentric rings that deny China the use of the sea inside the first island chain, defend the sea and air space of the first island chain nations, and dominate the air and maritime space outside the chain. According to Hammes this strategy would turn denial around to favor the U.S. and its allies, forcing China to fight at longer ranges while allowing the U.S. to play to its strengths “by employing primarily attack submarines, mines, and a limited number of air assets inside the first island chain.”^{xi} Hammes believes that because his strategy would not demand operations that would penetrate Chinese airspace, the possibility of nuclear escalation would be less and war termination easier.

Japan’s Role

Currently advocates on both sides of the U.S. debate are invoking the desires of Japan and other U.S. allies in the Pacific to bolster their side. Aaron Friedberg, a proponent of ASB, writes that frontline states in the Asia-Pacific such as Japan, Taiwan and the Philippines may not be reassured by a distant blockade. Friedberg argues that, “if China conquered Taiwan, or seized disputed islands in the East China Sea and dug in to defend them, closing the Malacca Strait would do little to force Beijing to disgorge its gains in the short run.”^{xii} Hammes, on the other hand, has argued that Japanese leaders have demonstrated concerns over the lack of clarity related to ASB and also claims that Japanese leaders know it will be politically impossible to convince the Japanese public to allow strikes into the Chinese mainland from bases in Japan.^{xiii} According to Hammes, Offshore Control has gained the interest of very senior leaders in Japan because it fits well with Japan’s current defense initiatives aimed at establishing its own A2/AD strategy in the southern island chain, does not require strikes into China and can be fully tested in open exercises. These exercises would not be politically sensitive because they are focused purely on the defense of Japanese territory.^{xiv}

One thing that all U.S. strategists do agree upon is the critical role that coordination with allies and partners in the region will have in any successful strategy. Japan’s new “Dynamic Joint Defense Force” concept, which builds on the 2010 National Defense Program Guideline’s

(NDPG) “Dynamic Defense Force” concept, indicates that it is ready to enhance its own role in deterrence in the southern island chain of the East China Sea. Many aspects of Japan’s new defense concept do appear concentrated on building a Japanese version of A2/AD along the Nansei Islands.^{xv} By enhancing its ISR capabilities in the area Japan is contributing to the alliance’s ability to maintain “battlefield information dominance” during any East China Sea contingency. New radar placements, Global Hawk UAVs purchased from the U.S. and Japan’s next generation P-1 patrol aircraft will aid in making Chinese activity in the area more transparent in peacetime and help provide redundancy should conflict emerge. Japan has also begun deploying Type 88 short range anti-ship cruise missiles (which are likely to be upgraded to newer Type 12 ASCMs) in the islands and continues to upgrade its already credible antisubmarine warfare and mine/countermine capabilities, including new helicopter carriers (DDH) and a planned increase in attack submarines from 16 to 22.

Japan is also spending billions of dollars on new Aegis destroyers, and 42 F-35 fifth generation fighters to be purchased from the United States. There have also been media reports indicating that Japan is in discussion with the U.S. regarding the development of its own unspecified “offensive strike” capability.^{xvi} Japan seems no longer content with the traditional sword and shield arrangement of the U.S. Japan alliance, where Japan provides a shield of defensive capabilities surrounding its territory and the U.S. provides offensive strike weapons capable of taking the fight to the enemy. Some analysts question, however, if Japan’s limited resources are being spent in the most effective manner, given more mundane military needs such as integration of command and control for air and cruise missile defense.^{xvii} Given that both countries face fiscal problems over the long-term, both Japan and the U.S. need to consider the most cost effective means for maintaining deterrence in the region.

Conclusion: Building Capacity, Cooperation and Information Sharing in the Region

China’s A2/AD planning and capabilities have been developed over a long period and will not be overcome easily with a rash of unsustainable big ticket weapons purchases. U.S. efforts to develop faster and longer range missiles can be matched by China over time.^{xviii} China’s A2/AD strategy relies heavily on the development of relatively low cost missiles and its geographical advantage. The U.S. and Japan must keep this in mind as they attempt to turn the tables on China.

A number of analysts have offered lower cost strategies that will, however, require a greater amount of diplomatic skill, trust and coordination. A technical report by the Rand Corporation envisions a ring of land-based anti-ship missiles ready to be deployed from the Straits of Malacca, Sunda, and Lombok, north to the Luzon Strait and on up through the Ryuku Islands. This multinational effort would require extensive development of command and control systems supported by intelligence capabilities, but could provide a lower cost alternative to using U.S. naval ships to implement a blockade and could free up these assets for other missions.^{xix} This type of approach would also require assets that could challenge and board ships, such as rotary-winged aircraft or partner nation navies and coast guards. The United States and Japan would be required to work with partner nations and build capacity toward this goal. Japan has already had significant success in building multilateral maritime cooperation in Southeast Asia under its Regional Cooperation Agreement on Combating Piracy and Armed Robbery against Ships in Asia (ReCAAP) program and has provided several countries with coast guard cutters under its Official Development Assistance (ODA) program.^{xx}

One of the outstanding problems facing the alliance is deterring China from carrying out small scale coercion without ever giving rise to decisive moments that would trigger the use of either Air-Sea Battle or a maritime denial strategy.^{xxi} Working with partner nations to build capacity and establish a broad based “maritime domain awareness and information sharing network” is critical to eroding China’s ability to coerce smaller nations. As Robert Haddick writes, “The goal would be to develop an accurate and timely picture of China’s maritime activities, of both its naval forces and its civilian and paramilitary patrolling. The network would then share this up-to-date picture with all its members so they could improve their responses to China’s maritime actions.”^{xxii} Though the U.S maintains information sharing agreements with its allies and partners in the region, most of these agreements are bilateral. In order to maintain “battlefield information dominance” the U.S. and Japan must work with partners in the region to create a seamless ISR network that would become a significant deterrent to hostile action.

The views expressed in these articles are those of the author and do not reflect the official policy or position of APCSS, the U.S. Pacific Command, the U.S. Department of Defense, or the U.S. government.

December 2014

- ⁱ Kishore Mahbubani offers what seems to be a viable, if politically difficult solution, suggesting that the Japanese government sell the islands purchased in 2012 to a private Japanese foundation or environmental group, while the Chinese agree to pull back their patrols and acquiesce to Japanese administration of the islands, “How to Prevent a War Between China and Japan,” *Bloomberg View* available online at: <http://www.bloombergvew.com/articles/2013-12-29/how-to-prevent-a-war-between-china-and-japan>. Please note that I do not concur with many analysts who have (somewhat naively) suggested that the issue should be taken to the International Court of Justice (ICJ) for a resolution. Without buy in from both parties, an ICJ ruling resolves nothing.
- ⁱⁱ Aaron L. Friedberg, *Beyond Air-Sea Battle: The Debate over US Military Strategy in Asia*. April 2014 (New York, NY: Routledge, 2014), pp.15-21.
- ⁱⁱⁱ Mark A. Stokes, *China’s Strategic Modernization: Implications for the United States* (Carlisle, PA: Strategic Studies Institute, 1999), p.97.
- ^{iv} The U.S. Pentagon has estimated China’s 2013 military spending at around \$145 billion. <http://www.reuters.com/article/2014/06/06/us-usa-china-military-idUSKBN0EG2XK20140606>.
- ^v Office of the Secretary of Defense, “Annual Report to Congress on Military and Security Developments Involving the People’s Republic of China 2014,” available online at: http://www.defense.gov/pubs/2014_DoD_China_Report.pdf.
- ^{vi} Andrew Erickson and David Yang, “On the Verge of a Game-Changer,” *Proceedings Magazine*, U.S. Naval Institute, May 2009, Vol. 135/5/1275, available online at: <http://www.usni.org/magazines/proceedings/2009-05/verge-game-changer>.
- ^{vii} Ronald O’Rourke, “China Naval Modernization: Implications for U.S. Navy Capabilities-Background and Issues for Congress,” Congressional Research Service, September 8, 2014, available online at: <http://fas.org/sgp/crs/row/RL33153.pdf>.
- ^{viii} DoD, Joint Operational Access Concept (JOAC) Version 1.0, 22 November 2011. See http://www.defense.gov/pubs/pdfs/joac_jan%202012_signed.pdf.
- ^{ix} ASBO, “Air-Sea battle: Service Collaboration to Address Anti-Access and Area Denial Challenges”, Washington DC, May 2013, p.1, referenced in Friedberg, “Beyond Air-Sea Battle”, p.77.
- ^x T.X. Hammes, “Offshore Control: A Proposed Strategy for an Unlikely Conflict,” Institute for National Strategic Studies, available online at: <http://inss.dodlive.mil/files/2012/09/SF-278.pdf>. Other variants of this strategy have been proposed, including Jeffrey E. Kline and Wayne P. Hughes Jr., “Between Peace and Air-Sea Battle: A War at Sea Strategy,” *Naval War College Review* 65, no 4 (Autumn 2012), available online at: <https://www.usnwc.edu/getattachment/e3120d0c-8c62-4ab7-9342-805971ed84f4/Between-Peace-and-the-Air-Sea-Battle--A-War-at-Sea.aspx>.
- ^{xi} Ibid.
- ^{xii} Friedberg, “Beyond Air-Sea Battle,” p.115.
- ^{xiii} T.X. Hammes, “Offshore Control vs. AirSea Battle: Who Wins?” *The National Interest* online available at: <http://nationalinterest.org/commentary/offshore-control-vs-airsea-battle-who-wins-8920>
- ^{xiv} Ibid.
- ^{xv} See Tetsuo Kotani’s discussion in “U.S.-Japan Allied Maritime Strategy: Balancing the Rise of Maritime China,” CSIS, April 2014, available at: www.csis.org/files/publication/140422_Kotani_USJapanAlliance.pdf.
- ^{xvi} Nobuhiro Kubo, “Japan, U.S. discussing offensive military capability for Tokyo-Japan officials,” Reuters online, Sept. 10, 2014, <http://uk.reuters.com/article/2014/09/10/uk-japan-usa-military-idUKKBN0H500L20140910>.
- ^{xvii} See for example Paul Kallender-Umezu, “Big-Ticket Buys Could Hurt Japan,” *Defense News*, April 13, 2014, available online at: <http://www.defensenews.com/article/20140413/DEFREG03/304130016/Big-Ticket-Buys-Could-Hurt-Japan>.
- ^{xviii} Mike Hoffman, “Congress Reacts to Chinese Hypersonic Missile Test,” *Defense Tech*, January 14, 2014, available at: <http://defensetech.org/2014/01/14/congress-reacts-to-chinese-hypersonic-missile-test/>.
- ^{xix} Terrence K. Kelly, Anthony Atler, Todd Nichols, and Lloyd Thrall, “Employing Land-Based Anti-Ship Missiles in the Western Pacific,” Rand Technical Report available online at: http://www.rand.org/pubs/technical_reports/TR1321.html.

^{xx} For Japan's RECAAP program see Yoichiro Sato, "Southeast Asian Receptiveness to Japanese Maritime Security Cooperation," Asia-Pacific Center for Security Studies, September 2007.

^{xxi} See Kotani, "U.S.-Japan Allied Maritime Strategy".

^{xxii} See Robert Haddick, *Fire on the Water: China, America and the Future of the Pacific*, Naval Institute Press, 2014 and Thomas G. Mahnken et. al., "Asia in the Balance: Transforming US Military Strategy in Asia," American Enterprise Institute, June 2012, available online at: <http://www.aei.org/papers/foreign-and-defense-policy/regional/asia/asia-in-the-balance-transforming-us-military-strategy-in-asia/>.